

Testimony

Senate Bill 2223

Senate Education Committee

Monday, January 31, 2005; 9 a.m.

North Dakota Department of Health

Good morning, Chairman Freborg and members of the Senate Education Committee. My name is Kathleen Mangskau, and I am director of the Division of Tobacco Prevention and Control for the North Dakota Department of Health. I am here today to provide testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 2223 relating to the distribution of the tobacco settlement moneys.

Ten percent of Tobacco Master Settlement Agreement funds are allocated to the Community Health Trust Fund. The programs funded by the Community Health Trust Fund are effective and are saving lives and money in North Dakota.

One program funded by the Community Health Trust Fund is the Community Health Grant Program, which funds school and community tobacco-prevention and other health-prevention services in all 28 local public health units across the state. Since the inception of this program in 2001, we have seen a significant drop in youth tobacco-use rates in the state. The percentage of youth who are current smokers decreased from 41 percent in 1999 to 30 percent in 2003. That means there are 9,000 fewer youth tobacco users today, resulting in future health-care savings of more than \$100 million. Adult smoking rates have also declined, from 23.2 percent in 2000 to 20.5 percent in 2003. That means there are nearly 12,000 fewer adult smokers in the state since 2000. At \$3,516 per smoker, this results in around \$42 million in direct health-care and lost-productivity savings per year. In addition, the Community Health Grant Program supports statewide tobacco cessation services through a state tobacco quitline available free of charge to all North Dakota residents.

The Community Health Trust Fund also supports the Dental Loan Repayment Program for dentists who practice in areas of need. Access to oral-health services is a serious concern because of the shortage of dentists in the state, especially in rural areas. Currently, nine dentists are enrolled in the loan repayment program. Removing the money from the Community Health Trust Fund would mean the service contracts with these dentists would have to be discontinued and repayment of their educational loans would stop.

I will also provide information about the reliability of tests for the presence of nicotine. Measuring cotinine levels measures nicotine levels and is usually determined

by testing urine samples. When a smoker stops smoking, it takes about five to seven days for the cotinine to clear his or her system. A nonsmoker exposed to secondhand smoke also has elevated cotinine levels, which will usually take five to seven days to clear his or her system, as well. That means a student who is a nonsmoker may test positive for nicotine if he or she is exposed to secondhand smoke.

This concludes my testimony. We urge your opposition to this bill to preserve programs that are working. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.